

Internship Abstract

Title: Cholera and its Impact on Haiti

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Purpose: To conduct a literature review on the policies/methods that can be used to reduce the severity of future cholera epidemic outbreaks in Haiti and create educational pamphlets for educators/patients.

Significance: The 2010 cholera epidemic in Haiti became one of the world's largest such epidemic over the past decades. Cholera had not been reported in Haiti since the 1800s. The October 2010 outbreak was due to the contamination of the Artibonite river which was contaminated by UN peacekeepers from Nepal where cholera happens to be endemic. The government reported approximately 526,524 suspected cases and 7,025 deaths starting from the initial outbreak in October of 2010 until January 2012. With an already weak infrastructure made even worse with the January 2010 earthquake, Haiti is a country where only half the population have access to health care. In terms of water and sanitation, only 24% of the population have access to a toilet, 69% have access to an improved water source and only 17% have improved access to sanitation facilities which means that open defecation is very common. Educating the patients at the Lyons Medical center on the symptoms of cholera and what can be done at the household level to prevent the disease, can lead to the education of family members in Haiti.

Method: An extensive literature review was conducted on the cholera epidemic using the Rutgers University Libraries database. Each abstracts were individually reviewed and were retained according to their relevance to the research question. The keywords that were used included cholera in Haiti, responses to the cholera epidemic in Haiti, public health in Haiti. The literature review resulted in a comprehensive look at the impact that the cholera epidemic had on the general population.

Results: An initial search using the Rutgers Libraries database resulted in over 2,000 peer reviewed articles which was further narrowed down to 302 articles using the keyword cholera. After each abstracts were reviewed, a total of 25 full-text articles were retained. The areas of assessment that were discussed were the lack/access of medicine/hospitals, training of health workers, improvements in water, sanitation and hygiene sector, and short term and long term responses.

Evaluation: The major finding showed that while rates have gone down significantly, cholera in Haiti continues to surge annually, specifically during rainy seasons and hurricanes. The people affected by this epidemic were mostly the ones who used water from the Artibonite River which happens to be the most important river on the island and nearly 80% of the confirmed cases came from the Artibonite department. These findings further support the need for the improvement of the water and sanitation infrastructure. The educational pamphlet created will hopefully serve to help inform the Haitian diaspora that cholera is still a danger to their family members back in Haiti and that precautions need to be taken.